

Chapter 20

Blogs in Teacher Education: Knowledge Sharing among Pre-Service Teachers on a Group Course Blog

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the content of written blog postings of students enrolled in a face-to-face course focusing on literacy assessment methods and practice for Pre-Service Teachers (PST) seeking elementary teaching certification. The purpose of the study was to examine the transcription of the students' postings and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) to look for the three types of elements that comprise the Community of Inquiry according to Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2001) as well as the examination of broader themes and trends across the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Data included blog posts from a 15-week semester with a total of 702 combined posts and comments from a total of 40 undergraduate students. Data were analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the framework of the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). Students engaged in various levels of cognitive stages of inquiry while also building on and developing social presence throughout the course. Teacher presence also guided the social construction of knowledge throughout the course. Examination of the teacher presence suggests that the instructor needed to provide more scaffolding in modeling evidence-based practice and problem-solving on the blog as students did not always connect their practice to evidence-based or text-based support.

INTRODUCTION

An ongoing challenge for instructors is finding the best ways of using emerging technologies and tools without the benefit of robust research that what we are doing clearly benefits our students' learning and engagement. One technology tool that can be used in blended learning contexts (as well

as online-only contexts) is that of the communal or shared weblog (blog) where the entire class of students can regularly post reflections, receive feedback that is visible to all, and share resources with peers. A blog is akin to an online diary and offers students a shared computer-mediated communication (CMC) space for group knowledge sharing and dialogue. In the case study described

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in this chapter, I share how forty undergraduate students participated in a group blog in conjunction with a face-to-face undergraduate literacy course designed for pre-service teacher candidates.

The overall purpose of the qualitative exploratory study was to examine the transcription of the students' postings and computer-mediated-communication (CMC) across the semester to look for the three types of elements that comprise a "community of inquiry" according to Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000; 2001) as well as to examine the primary research question: *How did the communal blog function to support a "blended learning" context where learning primarily took place in a face-to-face setting?* The study examines the content of the written blogging postings of a class of students who were enrolled in a pre-service course focusing on literacy assessment methods and practice.

The undergraduate students communicated with each other within the digital blogging community and were guided by semi-structured professor-designed prompts, multi-modal supplemental readings (such as YouTube videos and podcasts). Students were provided guidelines and a simple rubric for the blogging assignment. They posted blog commentary across the course of a full-length semester in spring, 2009. Through the blogging assignment and process, students made connections to key ideas in the course content, actively participated in an online community (within a face-to-face course), and developed their skills with digital writing and learning. The blog topics focused on their present understanding of course content as well as their goals in their case study and future teaching. The group blog served as a knowledge sharing tool towards building a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as well as an assessment tool for participation and engagement with the course content and readings. The blog was also a way for students in a teacher education course to participate in new digital literacy practices (as described by Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2005) by reading and writ-

ing in an online-only format. This idea of group blogging in a face-to-face or blended teaching setting would be of interest to anyone teaching a face-to-face class where students share knowledge as it is being applied to specific teaching contexts or scenarios. The blogging experience would also be of broad interest to anyone looking to explore or improve their practice in the area of blended learning, broadly defined.

BACKGROUND

Community of Inquiry and Blended Learning

This research draws upon a sociocultural framework which emphasizes that learning is based on apprenticeship and teaching occurs as a result of the co-construction of knowledge in shared communities of practice (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1962). I also draw on models of knowledge sharing and theories of tacit knowledge (e.g. Polanyi, 2009) to examine the complex ways that students supported one another in the blog space with the absence of the course instructor on the blog postings.

Within such a sociocultural framework, I specifically focus on the Community of Inquiry framework developed broadly by Garrison, Archer, and colleagues (especially Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). In applications to online learning, this framework delineates three crucial but inter-related categories in designing and analyzing computer-mediated communication. The three types of elements that make up a Community of Inquiry according to Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) include the teacher presence, cognitive presence, and the social presence. Teacher presence is facilitated by the up-front design of the course or online experience, direct instruction by the teacher, and use of facilitating discourse (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Cognitive presence, for in-

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